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**FIRST IN, RIGHT CHOICE:  
THE EMPLOYMENT OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES  
IN AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST OSAMA BIN LADEN,  
AL-QAEDA, AND GLOBAL TERRORISM**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

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Americans are at war. Americans are at war in a country where the former Soviet Union suffered its most disastrous military defeat, Afghanistan. There is a significant contrast between the misfortunes of the Soviet Army and the successes attained thus far by the different elements of United States Central Command. The salient difference is that the United States is not acting as a foreign aggressor seeking to impose its will upon a beleaguered nation. Conversely, the United States stands as a nation acting in concert with other nations opposed to the ubiquitous threat of global terrorism. U. S. military action in Afghanistan has been limited solely to the prudent application of military force which has, as of this moment, forced the capitulation of the Taliban and seeks to annihilate the Al-Qaeda terrorist network. This is a struggle that America and its allies must win in order to maintain, at the very least, regional stability. It is a war that will continue across the Middle East. In Afghanistan, the United States is winning, with much of the hard-earned success being attributed to small cadres of Special Operations Forces. Special Operations Forces (SOF) provide the operational CINC the flexibility to respond to a multitude of contingencies across the spectrum of armed conflict. SOF personnel are mature, first rate, superbly equipped, and intensely trained professionals who bring with them a regional focus to the area of operations. It is therefore incumbent upon the operational CINC to understand and appreciate fully the vast potential such forces bring to the strategic as well as the operational playing field. Though many of the battles thus far have been and will continue to be fought clandestinely, the outcomes result in obvious strategic victories. Clearly, the present war against global terrorists warrants the necessity for the predominant reliance upon U. S. Special Operations Forces.



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## PREFACE

In America's new war, this nation, in concert with her coalition partners and allies, is embarked upon a crusade of internationally accepted ideals versus extremism propagated through terrorism. In short, this is and will remain a complicated fight whereby a successful campaign in Afghanistan by itself will resolve very little. In fact, winning in Afghanistan will only embolden terrorist splinter groups worldwide and likely engender an unconstrained terrorist offensive against the United States as evidenced on September 11th. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was quoted as saying the fight against global terror "undoubtedly will prove to be a lot more like a cold war than a hot war...if you think about it, in the cold war it took 50 years, plus or minus. It did not involve major battles. It involved continuous pressure. It involved cooperation by a host of nations. It involved the willingness of populations in many countries to invest in it and to sustain it. It took leadership at the top from a number of countries that were willing to be principled and to be courageous and to put things at risk; and when it ended, it ended not with a bang, but through internal collapse." The words of Secretary Rumsfeld succinctly articulate the fight that lies ahead. Although the war in Afghanistan appears to be drawing to a successful close, the capitulation of the Taliban and subsequent collapse of Al-Qaeda are but mere segments of an overarching global campaign that will be waged by the United States over the next several years. Rooting out terrorists will be an arduous, amorphous, and secretive business where, in the interest of security and the successful prosecution of future operations, the public is not always apprised of victory. Combating asymmetrical threats such as these requires a predominant role for USSOCOM and for U.S. Special Operations Forces.



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## **FIRST IN, RIGHT CHOICE: THE EMPLOYMENT OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST OSAMA BIN LADEN, AL-QAEDA, AND GLOBAL TERRORISM**

Joint force commanders must clearly understand the capabilities and limitations of Special Operations Forces (SOF), astutely recognizing when and where to incorporate them into the Operational Scheme of Maneuver. "SOF provide the National Command Authorities and joint force commanders with a worldwide presence and a unique set of capabilities in war or operations other than war to augment the conventional arsenal of the U.S. armed forces. However, successfully using these forces requires significant levels of understanding, planning, and rehearsal. Unfortunately, relatively few senior officers have an appreciation of what SOF can and cannot do, what they are and are not."<sup>1</sup> Staffs must never forget that the level of training of SOF personnel is superior, and that SOF are a formidable force multiplier, particularly in the areas of Unconventional Warfare, Direct Action, Psychological Operations, and Civil Affairs. USSOCOM is the only headquarters within the DOD specifically directed by charter to conduct offensive counter terrorism or unconventional operations.<sup>2</sup> SOF provide the operational commander with the flexibility to respond to a multitude of contingencies across the spectrum of armed conflict.

In the current war against Al-Qaeda, the key to attaining operational success when employing SOF is proper integration--choosing the proper force structure to perform the critical task at hand. Proper integration also demands a requirement to work hand in hand with conventional forces. In doing so, a healthy rapport is developed between both types of forces that significantly enhance for both forces the chances for obtaining a successful military end state. The purpose of this research paper is to suggest that highly skilled Special Operations Forces are uniquely suited for fighting terrorists with a global reach capability. The paper will initially delineate the playing field by addressing the changing international order that has brought about this new form of warfare currently threatening civilization, as we know it.

The analysis will focus on the following areas: 1) The Changing International Order; A New Symmetry; 2) The New Symmetry Defined: The Contrast Between Symmetrical Conflict and the Asymmetrical Threat; 3) The Asymmetric Rhetoric of Osama bin Laden: The New Enemy; 4) Countering Asymmetry: Why Special Operations Forces? 5) USSOCOM: Evolution and Revolution; 6) SOF and Conventional Forces: An Assessment of Capabilities and Limitations and 7) SOF and the Future: The New Fight. The paper will conclude by postulating that the frequency of SOF employment will continue to increase given an ever-changing global strategic environment. However, in order for SOF to be most effective, they must be fully

integrated within the CINC's overall strategy and conventional operations. Undoubtedly, the war against global terrorism will prove to be most challenging for conventional as well as unconventional forces. There can be no question that SOF is ready and justifiably capable of leading United States efforts in the prosecution of a war that will preserve not only the security of this nation but civilization as we know it.

### **THE CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ORDER: A NEW SYMMETRY**

As this nation enters the new millennium, Americans face a time of great uncertainty and instability.<sup>3</sup> Service visions within the Department of Defense describe a future whereby nations exist in an extremely volatile strategic environment fraught with unique challenges. These challenges are the byproducts of a rapidly changing strategic environment coupled with the advancement of technology and increases in the lethality of modern weaponry. "Regional powers, rogue elements, and non-state actors will pose security challenges embracing conventional military and non-traditional capabilities. Regional and internal instability will create situations where ethnic, economic, social and environmental stresses accentuate violence. Multiple belligerents and a blurring of the distinctions and national affiliations among terrorist groups, sub national factions, insurgent groups, and international criminals will complicate an environment where a direct attack is often the least likely course of action."<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the enemies of the United States have clearly recognized the need to operate asymmetrically in myriad regions in order to pose a very perplexing, multi-faceted threat.<sup>5</sup> This should have been readily apparent to the United States at the conclusion of the war in Southwest Asia. Most military historians recognize that the Gulf War engendered a revolution in military affairs. "Rational" as well as "Irrational actors" from nation states around the globe closely scrutinized the strategic situation of the United States and the coalition forces as they destroyed the 4<sup>th</sup> largest army in the entire world (Iraq) in a mere 100 hours.<sup>6</sup> The lesson here was that in a "head to head" fight, the modern military organization of the United States was practically unbeatable. Those nations lacking the technological advantages in weaponry, communications, and avionics enjoyed by the United States were virtually dumbfounded. One might even argue that winning the war in the Gulf may have led to a undeserved feeling of superiority which later developed into an air of arrogance, thus engendering not only envy, but genuine hatred on the part of our adversaries. The idea of seeking to exploit the weakness of an adversary is not novel. 150 Years ago, Chinese strategists postulated the idea, "Loot a Burning House." The concept is, when the enemy suffers a major crisis, seize the chance to gain the advantage.<sup>7</sup> In other words, resolution prevails over pliancy. Strategic writings of the

ancient Orient are as applicable today as they were centuries ago, and our adversaries read and ascribe to them. One could easily argue that the World Trade Center was intended to be America's "burning house". American resolve and prudent action has obviated any chance of Al-Qaeda seizing any further opportunity. However, other irrational actors lie in wait. American vigilance is needed now more than ever.

In 1999, two Chinese officers wrote a book entitled Unrestricted Warfare which delineated methods for third world and developing countries, specifically China, "to balance the playing field" in terms of engaging the United States in high-tech war.<sup>8</sup> Given the terrorist attack upon the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup>, the book has proven to be prescient. It has also drawn the attention of both Eastern and Western military leaders as it advocates the means, both military as well as non-military, to combat the United States. It should be blatantly obvious that the underlying message throughout this work is that, should any power manage to weaken the United States, China gains regardless. In fact, one can argue that this work might very well serve as the impetus for an all out attack on the United States. China simply plants the seed and learns from the successes and mistakes of those who attempt to put their philosophies into practice. For example, "hacking into websites, targeting financial institutions, terrorism, using the media, and conducting urban warfare are among the methods proposed."<sup>9</sup> The book also masterfully raises questions that are indelibly etched in the minds of the leaders of any nation engaged in hostile action with another. "Is it necessary to use special means to wage psychological war aimed at soldiers' families far back in the rear area? When protecting a country's financial security, can assassination be used to deal with financial speculators? Can "surgical" strikes be made without a declaration of war against areas that are sources of drugs or other smuggled goods? Can special funds be set up to exert greater influence on another country's government and legislature through lobbying? Could buying or gaining control of stocks be used to turn another country's newspapers and television stations into the tools of media warfare? These questions in reality aren't questions at all, but are facets of an expanding methodology that facilitates the accomplishment of a strategic objective."<sup>10</sup>

Osama bin Laden recognized the importance of this new symmetry when he orchestrated the terrorist attacks against the United States last September. The egregious form of strategic asymmetry witnessed by this nation on 11 September 2001 was but a preview of what a new generation of Americans must now face. We face a more sinister enemy who prefers to strike the noncombatant. Of significance is the fact that this is an inexpensive means to debilitate national will via psychological terrorism and/or murder. Killing people on the cheap is what it's

all about. More importantly, in the terrorist 's mind, the killing of the innocent only serves to further his demented sense of purpose.

### **THE NEW SYMMETRY DEFINED: CONTRAST BETWEEN SYMMETRIC CONFLICT AND THE ASYMMETRIC THREAT**

When the average person visualizes or ponders the idea of modern conflict, he or she conceptualizes the ubiquitous images flashed before them by television and Hollywood. Students of military history may visualize still photos garnered from the two world wars. Either way, their conjured vision is comprised mostly of large attacking formations of infantry supported by tanks and heavy artillery. Overhead, the sky is filled with bombers and fighter aircraft, each tasked to accomplish a small part in the overall fight. "Saddam Hussein's military in 1991 was in many ways a miniature version of the Soviet army in its equipment, doctrine, and tactics. This was precisely the type of threat against which the U.S. military and its coalition partners drawn from NATO had been practicing for decades. Faced with the hammer of the U.S. military, Iraq configured itself as a nail. The outcome was never in doubt. Slobodan Milosevic's Serb forces were similarly Soviet-like, as are Kim Jong-Il's North Korean conventional forces."<sup>11</sup> This is, by definition, considered to be symmetrical conflict or conflict where combat organizations face each other linearly.

"Asymmetric threats are divided into three categories. First, there are vulnerabilities in the complex but fragile information technology (IT)-based systems-of-systems. Two examples would be, the jamming of communications that carry targeting information or the disruption of Global Positioning System navigation and timing signals. A second category of asymmetric threat is the potential use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) on the battlefield, at ports and airfields where U.S. power projection is taking place, or on the territory of allies the U.S. is trying to defend. This threat requires counter-proliferation capabilities such as protective suits and detectors, with accompanying tactics and doctrine for their effective use. The third category is a terrorist attack upon the U.S. homeland on a war-like scale as evidenced by the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Such attacks could potentially involve the use of weapons of mass destruction, specifically biological weapons. These attacks would be launched against the critical infrastructures upon which fragile modern society depends, including power, transport, communications, and finance; or from attack upon the persons and institutions of the federal government."<sup>12</sup>

"The specter of attack on our homeland is a relatively new one; in this century, America's wars have been far away: The country is favored by geography, with oceans to the east and west, and friendly neighbors to the south and north. But globalization and technological change

undercut the protection historically afforded by favorable geography: September 11<sup>th</sup> proved this."<sup>13</sup>

Osama Bin Laden, himself a master of asymmetry, will utilize all three facets of asymmetric warfare against the West, particularly the United States. Though at present he may lack the sophistication required to sabotage global positioning satellites or jam GPS guided attack systems, he recognizes that this technology is becoming more readily available for the right price. That is why it is so important for the United States to wage an effective diplomatic and financial war in concert with the current ground campaign in Afghanistan. Such actions can only serve to cripple Bin Laden and/or Al-Qaeda. What is truly astounding is the fact that certain Western nations like France will share technology with countries such as Iran and China (both on the "Axis of Evil" list) under the guise of promoting goodwill. In reality, this can only be described as a feeble attempt at appeasement, i.e. hoping to avoid a direct attack by selling to governments that support terrorism. In essence, France seeks to buy itself some security. This is a flawed strategy.

#### **THE ASYMMETRIC RHETORIC OF OSAMA BIN LADEN: THE NEW ENEMY**

On the eleventh of September 2001, the United States and its citizens received a message from the Islamic terrorist Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. It was a message that took the lives of nearly 3,000 innocent civilians. Many may argue that this was merely a message of death and terror. I believe the context of this message to be far more complex and far more sinister. Osama bin Laden's message is one of self aggrandizement veiled beneath religious and political overtones. Bin Laden hopes to engender an all out war against the West by citing failed Western policy ventures and flippantly describing such ventures as Western expansionism. For example, in Somalia, Bin Laden argues that U.S. aims were not to provide regional stability and humanitarian assistance to the Somali people. It was, in fact, a U.S. attempt to overthrow the entire Somali regime. What Bin Laden fails to articulate is that the corrupt regime was inextricably linked to the hunger crisis and destabilization in the region. A regime change and subsequent institution of martial law would have been necessary to eliminate the corruption inculcated upon the people by Somali Warlords. And with this statement comes the bottom line; Bin Laden's supporters never really get the whole story. One might even argue that the failure to articulate both sides of similar issues has significantly contributed to Arab distrust or misunderstanding of the United States. This is true for Bin Laden, and other Islamic extremists like him, as they always seem to hold the United States responsible for almost every tragedy or calamity that has plagued the Muslim world in the

twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> He also attributes America's "cultural and economic imperialism" for the plethora of social, economic, and political adversities that have drastically affected Muslim culture. He also believes the economic prosperity enjoyed by the United States and what he describes as America's 'cultural decadence' have lured Muslim governments away from the path of "true Islam." Bin Laden argues that Muslim independence and God's blessings can only be brought back to the Islamic world by returning to fundamental Islamic principals and the rule of Islamic law."<sup>15</sup> Lastly, bin Laden and other fringe elements point out that America and its international coalition partners defiled the sacred soil of Saudi Arabia during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm in Southwest Asia. He insists that both operations were proof of America's intention to dominate Middle Eastern affairs and prevent self-determination for the Arab nations.<sup>16</sup>

Bin Laden has astutely wrapped himself in the mantle of the Muslim struggle through which he selfishly seeks a lewd form of self-aggrandizement. His faith and actions are contrary to the teachings of Islam, as evidenced by the outspoken voices of moderate Arabs who are vehemently opposed to his violent actions; specifically, President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and King Abdullah II of Jordan. Many believe that bin Laden's concern for furthering the enrichment of Islam is ancillary to his more subtle and sinister goal of perpetrating the disruption of Western society. Note the word "disruption" as opposed to "destruction." The message of bin Laden lays the groundwork necessary to solicit support for an all out assault upon Western culture. It is the hope of bin Laden that these attacks will act as the catalyst to engender an East versus West conflict. Such an action would legitimize the warped theories and philosophies of bin Laden while providing him the one goal that riches never could; a total disconnect between the Arab and Western world. This is the new enemy.

### **COUNTERING ASYMMETRY: WHY SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES?**

What do we as a nation need to do militarily to counter the deadly message of Osama Bin Laden? As evidenced by combat operations in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda forces are not particularly fond of force on force engagements. This should come as no surprise to the student of military history. The mountainous regions in Northern Afghanistan are ideally suited to the defender, particularly when outnumbered. "Operation Anaconda" has proved that Al-Qaeda fighters prefer to burrow into snowy mountain caves and lie in wait in an effort to draw in attacking U.S. forces. On terrain of their choosing, Al-Qaeda fighters prefer to conduct hit and run attacks and establish ambush sites. Though 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain and 101<sup>st</sup> ABN troops are the lead elements currently taking the fight to Al-Qaeda, SOF avidly supports them. SOF are

perfect for rooting out the remaining nest of 600 or so Al-Qaeda fighters who are merely opting to prolong the inevitable. The superlative efforts of SOF in the mountains of Afghanistan have served to shatter the paradigm of conventional wisdom as it relates to SOF employment. SOF is clearly being justly recognized for its valorous efforts in what will be a dirty global war. With tenacity and guile and an indefatigable will, SOF is the reason why we are winning the current war against global terrorism.

Why is SOF the right choice? It all boils down to SOF missions and training. Let's analyze and describe Special Operations and look at some typical SOF missions. The U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) offers the following definition of special operations: "Special Operations encompass the use of small units in direct or indirect military actions that are focused on strategic or operational objectives. They require units with combinations of specialized personnel, equipment, training or tactics that exceed the routine capabilities of conventional military forces."<sup>17</sup>

Some examples of SOF missions are (these are not the full doctrinal definitions):

- **UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE (UW)**. Conduct a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations in enemy held, enemy controlled, or politically sensitive territory, primarily through the use of guerillas or other surrogate forces.
- **DIRECT ACTION (DA)**. Seize, damage, or destroy a target: capture or recover personnel or material in support of strategic/operational objectives or conventional forces.
- **SPECIAL RECONNAISSANCE (SR)**. Verify, through observation or other collection methods, information concerning enemy capabilities, intentions, and activities in support of strategic/operational objectives or conventional forces.
- **FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE (FID)**. Assist another government in any action program taken to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.
- **COMBATING TERRORISM (CBT)**. Preempt or resolve terrorist incidents.
- **PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS (PSYOP)**. Induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to U.S. objectives.
- **CIVIL AFFAIRS (CA)**. Establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations among military forces, civil authorities, and civilian populations to facilitate military operations.

- **COUNTERPROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS (CP)**. Combat proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons; intelligence collection and analysis; and support of diplomacy, arms control, and export controls.
- **INFORMATION OPERATIONS (IO)**. Actions taken to achieve information superiority while defending one's own information and information systems.<sup>18</sup>

Since the end of the war in Southwest Asia in 1991, U.S. forces have been involved in numerous military forays abroad which were categorized as being a subset of the acronym (MOOTW), or Military Operations Other Than War. MOOTW has now evolved into what is more commonly referred to as (SASO) or Stability and Support Operations<sup>19</sup> Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), as defined by Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, are an all encompassing term which delineates a vast assortment of functions whereby the military instrument of national power is used for purposes other than the large-scale combat operations usually associated with war. "Stability operations apply military power to influence the political environment, to facilitate diplomacy, or to interrupt or prevent specific illegal activities. These operations cover a broad spectrum. At one end are development and assistance activities aimed at enhancing a government's willingness and ability to care for its people. At the other are coercive military actions; these involve the application of limited, carefully prescribed force, or the threat of force, to achieve specific objectives. US military forces conduct support operations to assist designated groups by providing essential supplies and services in the face of adverse conditions, usually those created by man-made or natural disasters. Mission success in support operations, which are normally characterized by the lack of an active opponent, is measured in terms of the ability to relieve suffering and to help civil authorities respond to crises. Primary goals of these operations are to meet the immediate needs of the supported groups and to transfer responsibility quickly and efficiently to appropriate civilian authorities."<sup>20</sup>

By and large, MOOTW and SASO should be considered to be subsets of the asymmetric threat as U. S. military leaders are presented with unique challenges, not commonly associated with the intricacies of traditional combat operations. These challenges range from the complexity of the rules of engagement (ROE) to the criticality of translating national security objectives to military objectives. From humanitarian assistance/relief operations in Somalia and Haiti to peacekeeping operations in Kosvo, U.S. Forces have been tasked to perform these high risk/high profile type operations.

More important, however, has been the employment of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in conjunction with U.S. conventional forces in helping to attain these political goals/objectives.

SOF has been tasked many times to employ unconventional or unorthodox methods in seeking to attain a desired political end state. The full definition of Unconventional Warfare is "a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes guerrilla warfare and other direct offensive, low visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and evasion and escape. Unconventional Warfare is often referred to as UW."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to their obvious military value, SOF can provide a psychological one as well. The fear of having such units operating behind their lines can cause many commanders to tie up large numbers of forces in a counter-guerilla type operation instead of fighting at the front and adding their strength to the regular forces. For example, during the American Civil War, Confederate Colonel John Singleton Mosby, more commonly referred to as the "Gray Ghost of the Confederacy," commanded the 43<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Partisan Ranger Battalion. Mosby's Rangers conducted day and night raids against Union Forces and freely operated successfully in northern Virginia and Maryland from 1863 until the war's end. Striking supply depots and lines of communication, Mosby conducted incessant harassing attacks on Union forces, gathered intelligence, and established "Mosby's Confederacy," a friendly refuge just outside of Washington, D.C., whose inhabitants willingly supplied Mosby's men with food, lodging, and information on Federal activities.<sup>22</sup>

"The military value of the species of warfare I have waged is not measured by the number of prisoners and material of war captured from the enemy, but by the heavy detail it has compelled him to make, and which I hope to make him increase, in order to guard his communications, and to that extent diminishing his aggressive strength."<sup>23</sup> By his own account, Mosby's operations kept at least 30,000 Union soldiers away from the front lines. The key to Mosby's success was that his "entire force was seldom combined. Instead of this," Adolphus Richards wrote, "they would be divided into two or more detachments operating in different places. So it was not unusual for an attack to be made the same day upon the Ohio Railroad, upon the outpost in Fairfax County, and upon the rear of the army maneuvering against General Lee."<sup>24</sup> Though the battlefield environment has been significantly transformed since the days of the American Civil War, the ubiquitous constant has been the necessity to maintain a cadre of highly skilled and agile warriors, possessing an incessant drive to succeed. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, SOF is such a force. The simple mention of SOF strikes fear in the hearts of our most

formidable adversaries. If there is any doubt that this statement is true, one need only ask captured members of the Taliban now vacationing in Cuba.

## **USSOCOM: EVOLUTION**

"In April 1987, the Secretary of Defense established the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), whose mission is to provide trained and combat-ready special operations forces to the five geographic CINCs. USSOCOM's mission as delineated in the 1987 JCS Manual 71-87, was to prepare SOF to carry out assigned missions and, if directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense, to plan for and conduct special operations. Mission responsibilities were:

- Develop doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures for special operations forces.
- Conduct specialized courses of instruction for all special operations forces.
- Train assigned forces and ensure interoperability of equipment and forces.
- Monitor the preparedness of special operations forces assigned to other unified commands.
- Develop and acquire unique special operations forces equipment, material, supplies and services.
- Consolidate and submit program and budget proposals for Major Force Program 11.
- Monitor the promotions, assignments, retention, timing and professional development of all special operations personnel".<sup>25</sup>

Since 1987, USSOCOM has evolved into a very effective force provider for the National Command Authorities and operational CinCs. This evolutionary process was the result of five visionary CINCSOCs. These five Generals, James J. Lindsay, Carl W. Stiner, Wayne A. Downing, Henry H. Shelton, and Peter J. Schoomaker, each faced daunting challenges while commanding USSOCOM.

General Lindsay, the first CINCSOC, worked diligently to ensure that USSOCOM served as the impetus behind SOF restructure and revitalization. Of significance is the fact that this was astutely done without estranging USSOCOM from conventional combatant commands, most notably during Operation "Just Cause."<sup>26</sup>

General Stiner took command in 1990 just prior to Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm and immediately set to work acquiring mandatory "special operations" peculiar equipment, material supplies and services.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, following successful operations in Southwest Asia, General Stiner began in earnest to sell SOF capabilities and successes in an effort to engender public support. These efforts demonstrated to an American public that SOF were a

viable part of the nation's defense. Eventually, General Stiner, with the support of the Secretary of Defense, was to absorb Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and Civil Affairs (CA), thereby incorporating them into SOF.<sup>28</sup>

General Downing, already a legend in the "special operations" community, was the third commander of USSOCOM. General Downing immediately set to work organizing and streamlining USSOCOM in an effort to prepare for operations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He instituted a Strategic Planning Process in an effort to effectively budget for potential SOF missions.<sup>29</sup>

The "cleanup batter" for USSOCOM was General Henry H. "Hugh" Shelton, who took the mantle of command during a period of extraordinary worldwide demand for SOF.<sup>30</sup> This was done in the face of an ever-shrinking budget as USSOCOM's budget was reduced by more than six percent, while SOF operations increased by more than fifty-one percent.<sup>31</sup> General Shelton's biggest public challenge was to be the operational commitment to the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia, Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR/JOINT GUARD. The Bosnian mission, as well as the plethora of SOF missions in areas such as Sierra Leone, Albania, and Liberia, drove USSOCOM to develop "force module packages." This effort was characterized by pre-configuring SOF operating supplies for a particular type of SOF mission, therefore substantially paring down mission preparation time while still offering the correct force mix.<sup>32</sup>

By November 1997, when General Schoomaker assumed command, the global strategic environment was beginning to look even more ominous, as there were a myriad of contingencies requiring SOF. Most notable during this period was Operation ALLIED FORCE, which subsequently forced Serbian forces out of Kosovo.<sup>33</sup> Although the history of USSOCOM is still being written, it should be evident that, through prudent leadership, it has evolved into a highly effective organization.

## **SOF AND CONVENTIONAL FORCES: AN ASSESSMENT OF CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS**

"SOF differ from conventional forces in that they are specially organized, trained, and equipped to achieve military, political, economic, or psychological objectives by unconventional means. Special operations are conducted independently or in coordination with conventional forces during peacetime--operations short of declared war or intense warfare--and war. Political and military considerations sometimes shape special operations and often require clandestine, covert, or low-visibility techniques. Special operations also significantly differ from conventional operations because of their enhanced physical and political risks, operational techniques, mode

of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets." <sup>34</sup>

Conventional forces by nature tend to view the operational fight from a "macro" level and generally are not narrowly focused. SOF, on the other hand, tend to be smaller in size yet regionally focused. As a matter of fact, many of the skills possessed by SOF are rarely found in conventional military organizations. In order to better articulate advocacy for the predominant utility of SOF in the nation's current war, it is necessary to discuss SOF capabilities and limitations.

As with any organization, SOF has "chinks in its armor." However, these "chinks" are generally the result of a misunderstanding on the part of operational commanders coupled with improper utilization of the organization, i.e., SOF being used as substitute for missions best suited for conventional forces. Conversely, conventional forces serve as the backbone of our nation's military capability. "Consisting of four elements— land, naval, aviation, and mobility— these forces conduct the full range of military missions, with the obvious exception of special operations, nuclear deterrence, and space operations. As such, they play a crucial role in executing the defense strategy which focuses on shaping the international environment and responding to a broad variety of crises. Toward this end, conventional forces perform forward presence missions, engage in a range of smaller-scale contingencies, and conduct combat operations up to and including major theater of wars." <sup>35</sup> Conventional forces bring to the operational table all the tools necessary for the arduous and sustained fight. It should be noted that conventional military organizations can and have conducted special operations. A notable example would be the German 1st Battalion, 1st Parachute Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division assault in 1940 on the fortress of Eben Emael. Eben Emael was the most modern fortress in Belgium, constructed between 1931-1935 and sited to guard the junction of the Albert Canal with the Meuse. These two waterlines offered the most important obstacle to an invasion of central Belgium from Germany and were the main feature of the 'delaying position' behind which the Belgian Army planned to organize its resistance. The capture of Eben Emael was therefore essential to the Germans if they were to rapidly overwhelm Belgian - and Allied - defense of the Flanders route into northern France. It could not be taken quickly by conventional assault and Hitler therefore decided, apparently on his own inspiration, to capture it by glider descent. A specially trained *Sturmgruppe*, comprised of 78 engineers carried in ten gliders, was to crash land around the fort and on its roof, blow holes through the steel and concrete with 'shaped' charges, and force the garrison, 1200 strong, to surrender. The operation went almost exactly as planned. After keeping the garrison entombed and helpless for 24 hours, 10-11 May, the

ground spearhead of Fourth Panzer Division arrived, placing the fort firmly in German hands.<sup>36</sup> The attack was certainly one of the single most brilliant and fruitful airborne operations of the war.

Another notable example would be Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle's raid on Tokyo. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Doolittle trained 16 volunteer B-25B Mitchell bomber crews to take off utilizing less than 1/3 of the standard runway length of 1,200 feet. The training was rigorous and exhausting. The Mitchell Bombers had to be significantly modified as the belly turrets were removed and 60-gallon gas tanks had to be installed. Since the B-25B Mitchell possessed no rear machineguns, Doolittle installed black broomsticks in the tail section of the aircraft to hoping to discourage any Japanese attacks from that direction.<sup>37</sup>

The secretive "Norden" bombsight was removed and a jury-rigged sight was installed. This was done in part for security reasons but also due to the fact that the bombings were to be conducted low level, and the Norden sight was primarily designed for high altitude bombing.<sup>38</sup>

In March 1942, the aircraft were secretly loaded aboard the USS Hornet where the 16 aircrews would eventually be briefed on their precarious mission. The initial plan was to launch the bombers once the naval task force was within 500 miles of the Japanese mainland. After striking selected targets, the bombers would fly on to designated airfields in Mainland China. Unfortunately for Doolittle, Japanese fishing boats spotted a U.S. Navy PBY patrol plane scouting ahead of the task force about 650 miles off the Japanese coast. The task force immediately sunk the fishing boats but the element of surprise had been lost and necessitated that Doolittle's aircraft be launched immediately. The 16 bombers struck targets in Tokyo, Kobe, Nagoya and Yokohama. Because of the added distance, no plane was able to make the Chinese airfields and most of the planes crash-landed in China, with one plane landing in the Soviet Union. Of the 75 fliers who landed in China, three died in accidents and eight were captured by the Japanese. The rest returned to the United States. Of significance is the fact that the raid inflicted a tremendous psychological blow to the Japanese psyche.<sup>39</sup>

Sometimes, however, an ill-conceived plan or unrealistic merging of SOF and conventional forces in an effort to conduct special operations can lead to costly consequences. On 4 November 1979, a group of militant Iranian students and a revolutionary faction known as the Pasdaran Revolutionary Militia seized the American Embassy in Iran. Fifty-three Americans were taken hostage. Within two days, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski formally instructed Defense Secretary Harold Brown to develop a rescue plan—Operation Eagle Claw. The most difficult aspects of Operation Eagle Claw would be the infiltration and exfiltration of the rescue force. It would require the use of both fixed and rotary-wing aircraft.<sup>40</sup> Fixed wing

assets would launch from bases in Oman and Egypt, while rotary-wing aircraft, Navy RH-53Ds, piloted by U.S. Marines, would fly from the USS NIMITZ afloat in the Indian Ocean. More importantly, the entire operation would be conducted during the hours of darkness.<sup>41</sup> On the night of 24 April 1980, after covertly penetrating Iranian airspace and adeptly arriving at a secretive airfield in the middle of the Dasht-e-Kavir desert (code named "Desert One"), located 250 nautical miles south of Tehran, the rescue mission was aborted. This was a command decision based upon Colonel Beckwith's GO/NO GO criteria for mission execution. One of the six helicopters that arrived at Desert One was declared unsafe to fly. Limited to five helicopters, Colonel Beckwith aborted the mission. In the process of downloading equipment and refueling for exfiltration, an RH-53D helicopter's rotor blades slammed into an Air Force EC-130 (internally loaded with 3,000 gallons of fuel), igniting fuel and ammunition. Airmen from the EC-130 and three Marine Helicopter crewmen were killed. In the ensuing chaos, the five helicopters, filled with classified documents, and the dead air crewmembers were abandoned. The valorous attempt to rescue the hostages ended in fiasco in the desert of south central Iran.<sup>42</sup> What is important to understand is that an improper force mix between SOF and conventional forces coupled with an unrealistic expectation of resulting capabilities will inevitably lead to egregious consequences.

In May 1997, A Government Accounting Office (GAO) directed study entitled: **Special Operations Forces: Opportunities to Preclude Overuse and Misuse of SOF** yielded several elucidating conclusions. In a letter report submitted to Congress dated May 15 1997, the GAO determined that: "SOF have come to be the CINCs' force of choice in many instances."<sup>43</sup>

**TOP THREE SOF MISSION PRIORITIES AT THE MAJOR COMMANDS**

<b><u>Major Command</u></b>	<b><u>First</u></b>	<b><u>Second</u></b>	<b><u>Third</u></b>
<b>EUCOM</b>	Counterproliferation	Foreign Internal Defense	Special Recon
<b>PACOM</b>	Special Recon	Counterterrorism	Counterproliferation
<b>USACOM</b>	Foreign Internal Defense	Special Recon	Counterterrorism
<b>CENTCOM</b>	Counterterrorism	Counterproliferation	Special Recon
<b>SOUTHCOM</b>	Foreign Internal Defense	Special Recon	Counterterrorism

In two of the five theater commands the GAO visited, CINC officials and SOF unit leaders oriented to those theaters agreed on the top three mission categories SOF should conduct to support the CINCs' regional strategies. There was, however, some disparity between the views of the CINCs and SOF unit leaders on mission priorities in the remaining three theaters, and there was less agreement overall on the priorities of collateral missions performed by SOF, such as antiterrorism activities.

Officials at the major commands GAO investigators visited expressed a high degree of satisfaction with SOF support of their regional requirements. They said the CINCs consider SOF the force of choice for many diverse combat and peacetime missions. For example, officials at the European Command said that SOF are critical to the CINC's ability to conduct engagement activities with an increasingly smaller force. For crisis response in the current low-intensity security environment, the staff considered SOF as the most important. Officials in both the European and Pacific Commands said they plan to employ SOF first when a potential crisis develops, forming a joint SOF task force to assess the situation, advise the CINC, and prepare the area for follow-on action, if necessary.

More significantly, officials at the Southern Command said that nothing could be done militarily in the theater without SOF. They stated that the Command's area of responsibility, which comprises many countries that do not commit much funding to their militaries, was made for SOF. "The primary activities in this theater are the training of foreign military officials, counter narcotics operations, and miscellaneous other-than-war operations--activities in which SOF excel. Officials also stated that SOF are good ambassadors for the United States as the CINCs' use SOF as one of the elements available to them to support their regional strategies."<sup>44</sup> The underlying theme throughout this report is that SOF plays a pivotal role in the operations of every CINC.

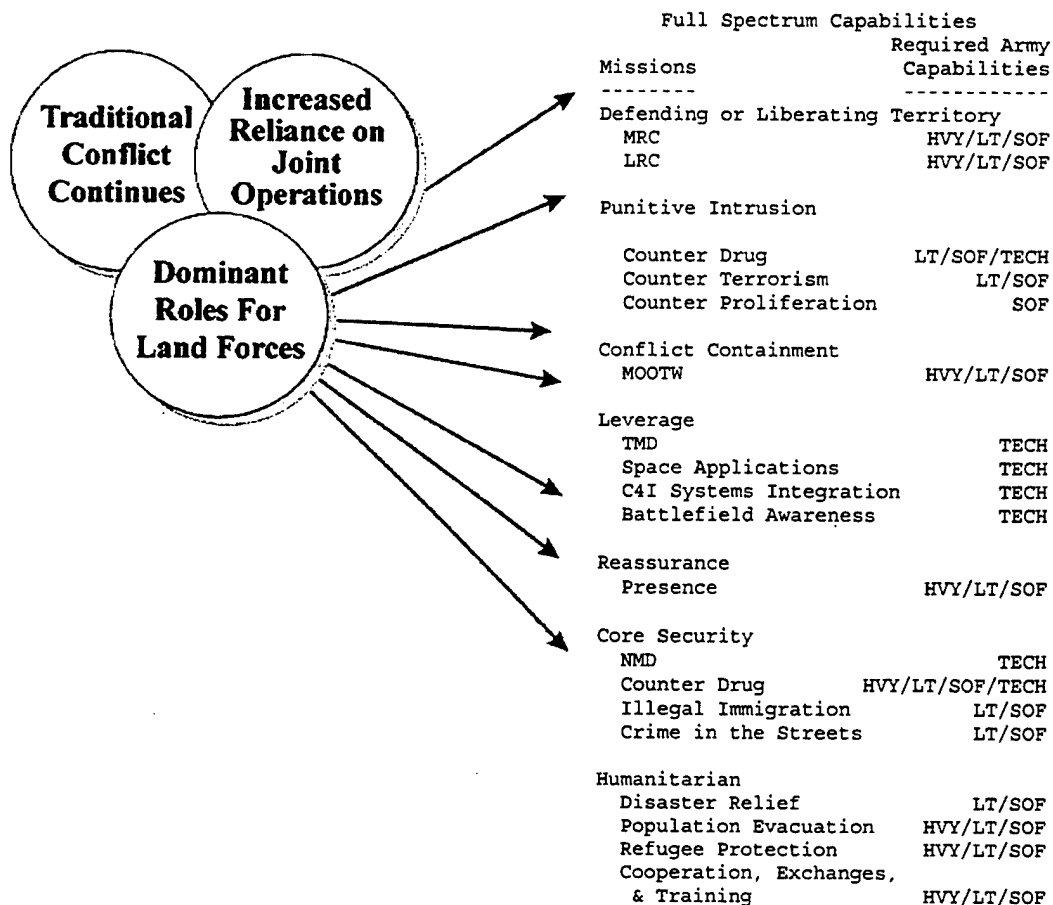


FIGURE 1 U.S. ARMY VISION 2010 CHART DELINEATING RELIANCE UPON SOF

## SOF THEMES AND THE FUTURE: THE EXPANDING FIGHT

The Army has recently begun a transformation process thereby seeking to engender a force that is more expeditionary in nature. Advancements in weapons technology and development, information warfare, and mobility have progressed to the point where strategic consequences evolve not in a matter of days but in a few hours. As such the requirement now exists to get to the fight quickly and to subsequently influence the battlefield rapidly and decisively. This effort requires unimpeded cooperation between SOF and conventional forces. Most strategists argue that the future demands that the United States develops a multi-faceted military force that is more capability based than one based on perceived threats. Regardless of one's perspective on the issue, SOF will play a pivotal role. President Bush in his recent "Axis of Evil" speech clearly put on notice those countries that openly support global terrorism and vehemently oppose U.S. values and ideology. There can be no doubt that SOF will operate in a future wrought with more frequent and direct challenges directed against the government of the United States as well as the American homeland. The continued proliferation of nuclear and

chemical weapons among rogue nation states will remain a ubiquitous threat. The lights in laboratories around the world have never burned brighter, as scientists earnestly seek to acquire more lethal technologies. Imagine the implications of a rogue nation state that manages to acquire a compact nuclear device i.e., a suitcase or man packed nuclear weapon. As the ability to conduct precise surveillance of WMD facilities by UN inspection teams has been terminated and/or eroded, particularly in countries such as Iraq and North Korea, it is reasonable to believe that WMD research and development in these nations continues, perhaps at an alarming rate. Failure to collect such information is detrimental to the development of an effective U.S. counterproliferation policy. More importantly, failing to gather detailed intelligence on a nation's WMD capability could directly result in a devastating attack against the United States, the results of which would make the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> pale in comparison. SOF could conduct a wide range of counter actions from direct action to collecting soil and water samples in an effort to detect the presence of radioactive residues which uranium enrichment and plutonium extraction processes deposit.<sup>45</sup> It should also be noted that the difficult war in Afghanistan is far from over and that the war against global terror has now expanded to Basilan Island in the Philippines. In either case, long after the fighting has subsided, it will be incumbent upon the United States to maintain an active presence in both regions. SOF specifically will provide the structure to support Foreign Internal Defense missions and Psychological Operations. The demands upon SOF in the future will continue to be burdensome. Though SOF possess a unique one-of-a-kind skill set that distinguishes them from conventional forces, the requirement for cooperation between SOF and conventional forces cannot be overemphasized.

"This is particularly true in an era where conflict may be characterized one minute by the seizure and takedown of a chemical weapons plant by SOF in one region while assisting conventional forces in a "head to head" fight in another. The future utility of SOF increasingly hinges upon regional knowledge, flexibility, political awareness, and discipline with the understood necessity to work in concert with conventional forces."<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As of the writing of this paper, we as a nation have witnessed dramatic success in Afghanistan and now watch as America's war against global terrorism has begun the transition to Basilan Island in the Philippines. Of significance is the fact that SOF once again finds itself leading the way. What we don't know is, where will the United States go next? This information, for obvious reasons, remains one of this nation's closely guarded secrets. Much of America's future requirements for SOF will require traditional SOF capabilities while others,

such as peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and counter proliferation, are reasonably new and are the subject of developing SOF doctrine.<sup>47</sup> Operations such as UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, ASSURED RESPONSE, JOINT GUARDIAN, and now ENDURING FREEDOM have proven that SOF are as valuable as facilitators and peacetime operators as they are as agile warriors.<sup>48</sup>

As America looks toward future conflicts, "SOF faces two major challenges -- they must continue to integrate with conventional forces, other U.S. agencies, friendly foreign forces, and other international organizations (for example, the United Nations) -- while preserving the autonomy necessary to protect and encourage the unconventional approach that is the soul of special operations."<sup>49</sup> In so doing, SOF will prevail against the asymmetric threats of potential adversaries. Success in the mountains of and on the plains of Afghanistan have demonstrated the validity and utility of SOF, ultimately proving that in future conflicts SOF should be the first in, where they will understandably prevail.

WORD COUNT = 7,015

## ENDNOTES

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